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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 000941

SIPDIS

LONDON AND PARIS PASS AFRICA WATCHERS
DIA/J2 PASS GHAYES
COMMERCE PASS PHUEPER
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TAGS: [EPET](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGER DELTA WAITS FOR MILITARY ACTION

REF: A. LAGOS 869

[1](#)B. LAGOS 871

[1](#)C. ABUJA NI 760

Classified By: ROBYN HINSON-JONES FOR REASONS 1.4 (B), (D) AND (E)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: We have no reports of military action over the weekend in the Niger Delta swamps as residents and oil companies anticipate a GON response to an attack on Friday, April 23 that left seven dead, including two AmCits and three Nigerian Navy security personnel (reftels). Press reports over the weekend clarified that U.S. armed forces are not being deployed to the region. Meanwhile, oil operations appear normal in the Delta. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) We have no reports of significant military action over the weekend in response to the attack on a ChevronTexaco-contracted utility boat April 23 off the Benin River in the troubled Niger Delta. Seven of nine occupants of the boat were killed by gunfire, including two AmCit contractors, three Nigerian Navy personnel onboard for security, and two Nigerian contractors operating the vessel. A fourth Navy personnel escaped unharmed, and a third AmCit, an employee of ChevronTexaco, was shot but survived. A GON security official was injured during the subsequent rescue of the attack's survivors.

[1](#)3. (C) Reports from a variety of sources last week indicated the military was readying itself for operations against villages in the area in an effort to capture the killers, deter future incidents of this nature, and restore oil company confidence that the region is safe to work in. There were conflicting reports whether the military was targeting Itsekiri or Ijaw villages, and whether it was focusing on an area along the Benin River near the location of the shootings, or on villages near the Escravos facility. It appears high-level military personnel toured the Delta both for reconnaissance and as a means to boost troop morale. Press reports last week indicated that President Obasanjo ordered Rear Admiral Antonio Bob-Manuel, the Flag Officer Commanding (FOC) of the Western Naval Command based in Lagos, to travel to Warri and oversee operations from there for at least one week.

[1](#)4. (C) On Saturday, May 1, a Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) security manager stationed at the Escravos crude oil terminal and tank farm reported observing no military action to date. He said, "we are not seeing and not anticipating any major operations against Ijaw/Itsekiri villages in our area or along the Benin River at the moment." He did note that several senior Navy officials visited the facility on Friday, April 30, and that he anticipated military action of some kind in the future, but he suggested no time frame. He offered no news of military movement in a separate communication on Sunday, May 2.

[1](#)5. (C) The CNL security manager described the Delta region as "understandably quiet," and said Chevron continues to fly personnel and equipment to offshore locations and across the swamps. He said pilots have been tasked to report any observed activity by community militants or by government security forces (GSF). He also said CNL continues to use boats to supply the GSF security teams in place at major facilities. (Note: Oil companies in the Delta provide food, water, shelter and sometimes transport for military and police forces assigned to protect oil installations. End Note.) We have seen no change in Shell's posture since last week, when Managing Director Chris Finlayson told Consul General that Shell operations were largely unaffected by the April 23 attack, other than some heightened security.

[1](#)6. (U) Over the weekend, Nigerian newspapers reported that the United States was not sending troops to the Delta in response to the attack. These stories clarified news stories from last week that claimed teams of investigators were being sent by the State Department to investigate the attack, and that the Joint Task Force (JTF) commander in Warri welcomed U.S. troops to the Delta to assist in ferreting out the culprits and securing the region.

HINSON-JONES